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ABSTRACT

These charts describe adults' and adolescents' views on teen sex and pregnancy. Data come from national surveys of adults and adolescents that examined attitudes toward teen sex and pregnancy, factors influencing teens' sexual decisions, parents' roles, and adults' and teens' advice for policymakers. There is near unanimous agreement among both groups that teen pregnancy is a serious problem. Over three quarters of adults and half of teens believe that teens should not be sexually active, but that those who are should have access to contraception. About three-quarters of adults and teens believe that advocating abstinence as the first and best option while also providing information about and access to contraception sends a clear, specific message. Over half of the teens overestimate the percentage of high school students who have had sex. Adults also overestimate this percentage, and they underestimate the percentage of teens who get pregnant. Adults cite friends as the main influence on teens' sexual decision making, while teens believe that parents have the most influence. Most adults and teens consider it important for teens to receive a strong message from society that they should abstain from sex until they are at least out of high school. (SM)

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THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

With One Voice:

America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy

A National Survey

April 2001

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The National Campaign would also like to thank Melissa Herrmann and Jennifer Schmidt of International Communications Research for their assistance with this project. And thanks to the National Campaign staff for their invaluable help in developing this survey. Particular appreciation goes to Bill Albert, who has been responsible for this survey from the beginning. He and his colleague, Ingrid Sanden, shepherded this report — like all National Campaign publications — from start to finish with real skill and dedication.

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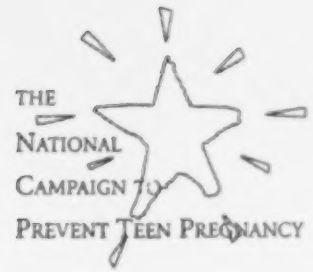

With One Voice:

America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy

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April 2001

INTRODUCTION

Debates over preventing teen pregnancy often shed more heat than light. While nearly all of us share the view that it is in young people's own interest and that of future generations to postpone pregnancy and childbearing until adulthood, there are often intense disagreements over how best to achieve this important goal. Some suggest that teen sexual activity is a natural and healthy part of growing up and that as long as partners consent and protection is used, sex among teenagers is just fine. On the other side are those that believe sex outside of marriage, at any age, is wrong and therefore there is little need to discuss contraception in a comprehensive way with unmarried teens.

In January and February of 2001, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy commissioned International Communications Research, a polling firm based in Pennsylvania, to conduct nationally-representative surveys of both adults (age 20 and over) and teens (age 12-19) to get their views on teen pregnancy and related issues. This is the most recent — and largest — survey work ever done by the National Campaign. (Previous polling results can be found on the Campaign's website — www.teenpregnancy.org.) The survey provides many intruiging findings, some of which confirmed long-held beliefs of the National Campaign, while others offer new and important insights about this complicated issue. For instance, we were struck by how much *agreement* there is across gender, race, income, and geography. When taken as a whole, however, the survey offers one single primary and unifying theme: the overwhelming majority of Americans, adults and teens alike, share a rather common sense view of teen sex and pregnancy — a middle-of-the-road view that often is not represented by the extremes on this issue.

This chart book on what adults and teens think is divided into four sections: teen sex and pregnancy in general, factors that might influence teens' sexual decisions, the role of parents, and advice for policymakers. Highlights from the survey include the following:

- There is near unanimous agreement among adults and teens that teen pregnancy is a serious problem. Nine out of ten adults (93 percent) and nearly as many teens (88 percent) identify it as such. However, fully one-third of adults do *not* think that the young people in their community are getting a clear message from the adults in their lives that teen pregnancy is wrong, and only 57 percent of teens *strongly* agree that they are getting a clear message that teen pregnancy is wrong.

- Close to three-quarters of adults (73 percent) and a clear majority of teens (56 percent) hold the view that teens should not be sexually active, but teens who are should have access to contraception.

- Some people argue that advocating abstinence as the first and best option for school-age youth while also providing them with information about, and access to, contraception sends young people a confusing "mixed message." A clear majority of Americans disagree — seven out of ten adults (71 percent) and teens (75 percent) describe such a message as "clear and specific."

- Research and common sense suggest that peer influence is important during adolescence. What teens *think* other teens are doing has an impact on their behavior. But teens often don't have an accurate portrait of the sexual behavior of their peers. Over half of the teens we surveyed (54 percent) *overestimated* the percentage of high school students who have had sex. For their part, adults also overestimated the percentage of high school students who have had sex and *underestimated* the percentage of teen girls who get pregnant before they turn 20.

- When it comes to sex, many parents feel that they have lost their children to the influence of peers and popular culture. Our survey offers a different picture. When asked who influences teens' sexual decision-making the most, more adults (50 percent) cited friends than any other source. Teens, on the other hand, said *parents* were more influential than any other source. When asked where they learned the most about preventing teen pregnancy, 34 percent of teens said "parents," while 10 percent said "friends" and only 6 percent cited the "media."

When asked who is most responsible for fixing the problem of teen pregnancy, some 85 percent of adults and 63 percent of teens agree that parents and other adults must solve this problem.

- The survey's advice for policymakers is also clear. Nine of ten adults (95 percent) and teens (93 percent) said it was important that teens be given a strong message from society that they should abstain from sex until they are at least out of high school. When asked what advice they would offer leaders in Washington, large majorities of adults (69 percent) and teens (67 percent) said they would place greater emphasis on encouraging teens not to have sex *and* greater emphasis on contraception.

We hope that this survey lets teens and adults know that their views about teen sex and pregnancy are shared by many across the country. We also hope that it makes clear that the moderate views of the vast "middle majority" of Americans are too rarely reflected in the heated arguments that preventing teen pregnancy often stimulate.

Sarah S. Brown
Director
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

April 2001

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy's survey, *With One Voice: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*, is based on two national surveys, one of young people aged 12-19 and the other of adults age 20 and over. The survey was designed by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy with assistance from International Communications Research (ICR).

The teen survey is weighted to provide nationally representative estimates of young people aged 12-19. Field work for this survey was conducted from January 25 through February 8, 2001. Telephone interviews were conducted by ICR with 1,002 teens. The sample for this study was drawn using two different methods. The first sample source used Random Digit Dial (RDD). RDD numbers are drawn from telephone households throughout the continental United States. As a second sample source, a database of households that were listed as having teenagers 12-19 years old was tapped. The sample was designed by Marketing Systems Group of Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, a sister company to ICR. All interviews were conducted using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. The CATI system ensures that all questions are rotated and that when answer options were presented, they were also rotated. This rotating eliminates "question position" bias.

The adult survey is weighted to provide a nationally representative estimate of the adult population 20 years and older. Field work for this survey was conducted between January 31 and February 6, 2001. Telephone interviews were conducted by ICR with 1,024 adults. This survey was done as part of a national twice-weekly telephone omnibus service using a fully-replicated, stratified, single-stage RDD sample of telephone households. Sample telephone numbers are computer generated.

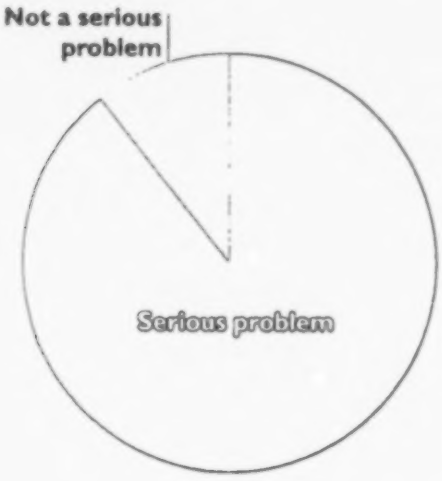
The overall margins of error are +/- 3.06% for adults and +/- 3.10% for teens.

Some of the responses to various questions do not total 100 percent. This is because we chose not to display the percentages that answered "don't know" or refused to answer. In addition, responses shown on Chart Thirteen total more than 100 percent; this is because respondents could choose more than one answer.

SEX AND PREGNANCY: CHART ONE

Do you think that the number of teenage pregnancies in the United States is a serious problem or not a serious problem?

Adults

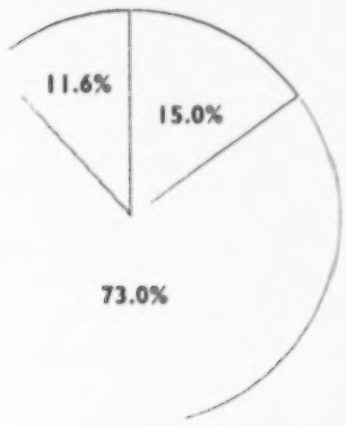


Teens

	Adults	Teens
Serious problem	**92.6%**	**88.0%**
Not a serious problem	5.8%	10.6%

SEX AND PREGNANCY: CHART TWO

I'm going to read you three statements about teens and sex. Please tell me which one comes closest to your view.



Adults

Teens

	Adults	Teens
☐ Teens should not be sexually active and should not have access to birth control (or "protection.")	15.0%	18.4%
☐ Teens should not be sexually active, but teens who are should have access to birth control (or "protection.")	**73.0%**	**56.3%**
☐ It's okay for teens to be sexually active, as long as they have access to birth control (or "protection.")	11.6%	25.0%

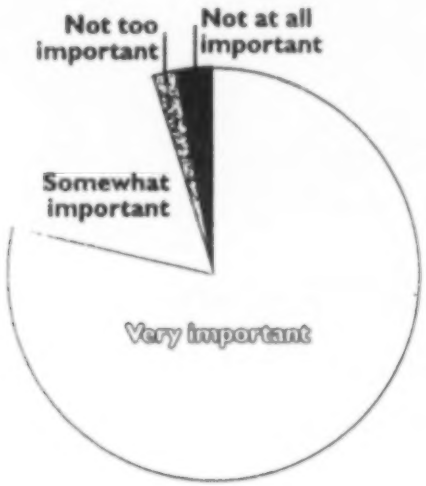
How Does This Compare with Past Campaign Surveys?

When polled by the National Campaign in 1997, 59 percent of adults said teens should not be sexually active, but teens who are should have access to birth control. In our polling this year, support among adults for this position had risen to 73 percent. Support among teens (aged 12-17) for this position in 2000 (we did not ask teens this question in 1997) was 54 percent — it is 56.3 percent among 12- to 19-year-olds this year.

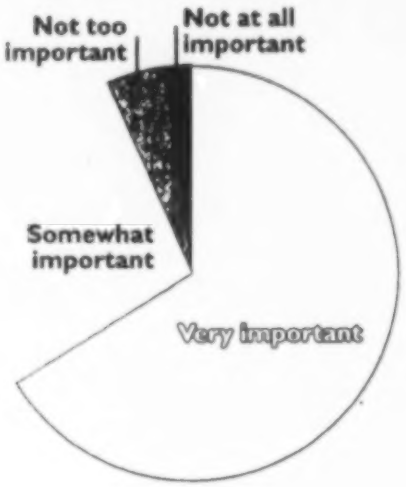
Sources: *A Summary of the Findings from National Omnibus Survey Questions About Teen Pregnancy*, National Campaign, 1997, and *Not Just Another Thing To Do*, National Campaign, 2000.

SEX AND PREGNANCY: CHART THREE

How important do you think it is for teens to be given a strong message from society that they should abstain from sex until they are at least out of high school — very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?



Adults



Teens

	Adults	Teens
Important net	**94.5%**	**93.3%**
Very important	78.0%	66.2%
Somewhat important	16.5%	27.1%
Not important net	**4.7%**	**6.6%**
Not too important	1.8%	4.5%
Not at all important	2.9%	2.1%

How Does This Compare with Past Campaign Surveys?

Support for providing teens a strong abstinence message has remained constant over the past five years. In 1997, 95 percent of adults (and 95 percent this year) said it was important for teens to be given a strong abstinence message from society that they should abstain from sex until they are at least out of high school. For teens, support for this position was 95 percent in 1997 (among 12- to 17-year-olds) and 93 percent this year (among 12- to 19-year-olds).

Source: *A Summary of the Findings from National Omnibus Survey Questions About Teen Pregnancy*, National Campaign, 1997

SEX AND PREGNANCY: CHART FOUR

Suppose a parent or other adult tells a teenager the following: "I feel very strongly that not having sex at all during your middle and high school years is your best option and the right thing to do. I also think it is important for you to receive information about birth control or protection. But, again, I think not having sex is your best option." Do you think this is a clear and specific message or do you think this is a confusing or mixed message?

Adults

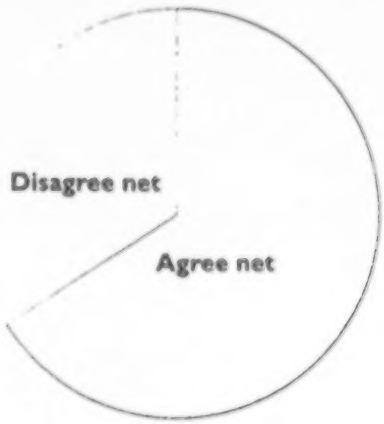
Teens

	Adults	Teens
Clear and specific message	**70.6%**	**74.7%**
Confusing or mixed message	28.3%	24.3%

SEX AND PREGNANCY: CHART FIVE

Question for adults

Please react to the following statement: "Kids in your community are getting a clear message from the adults in their lives that teen pregnancy is wrong." Would you say you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?

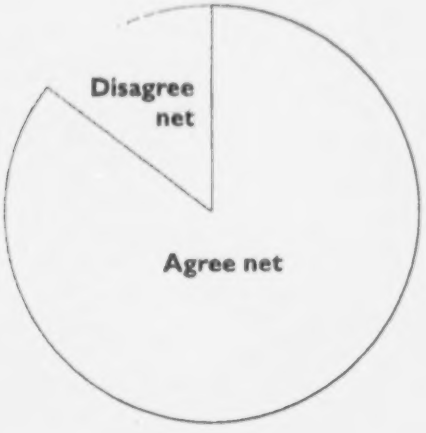


Adults

	Adults:
Agree net	**63.0%**
Agree strongly	36.0%
Agree somewhat	27.0%
Disagree net	**32.8%**
Disagree somewhat	18.6%
Disagree strongly	14.2%

Question for teens

Please react to the following statement: "I'm getting a clear message from the adults in my life that teen pregnancy is wrong." Would you say you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?

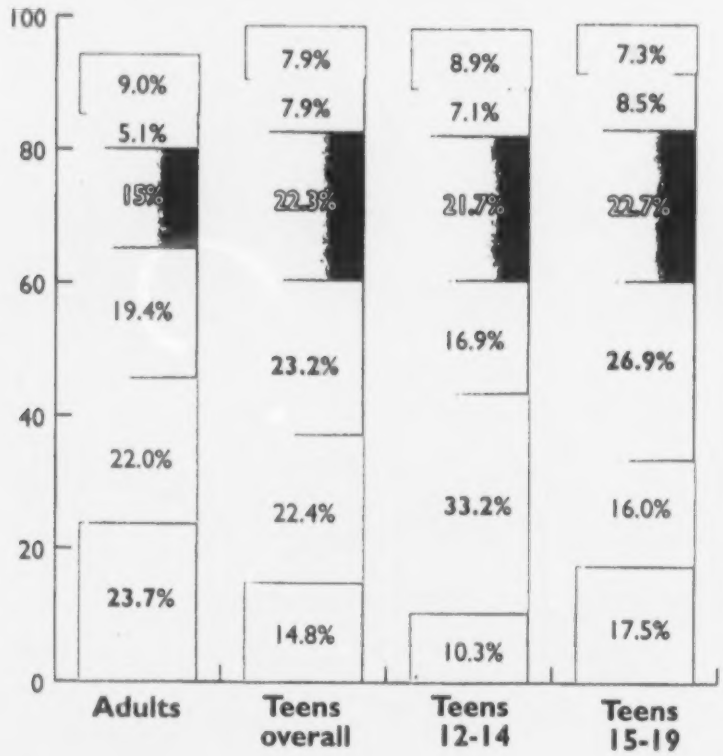


Teens

	Teens:
Agree net	**85.1%**
Agree strongly	57.2%
Agree somewhat	27.9%
Disagree net	**14.6%**
Disagree somewhat	10.7%
Disagree strongly	3.9%

SEX AND PREGNANCY: CHART SIX

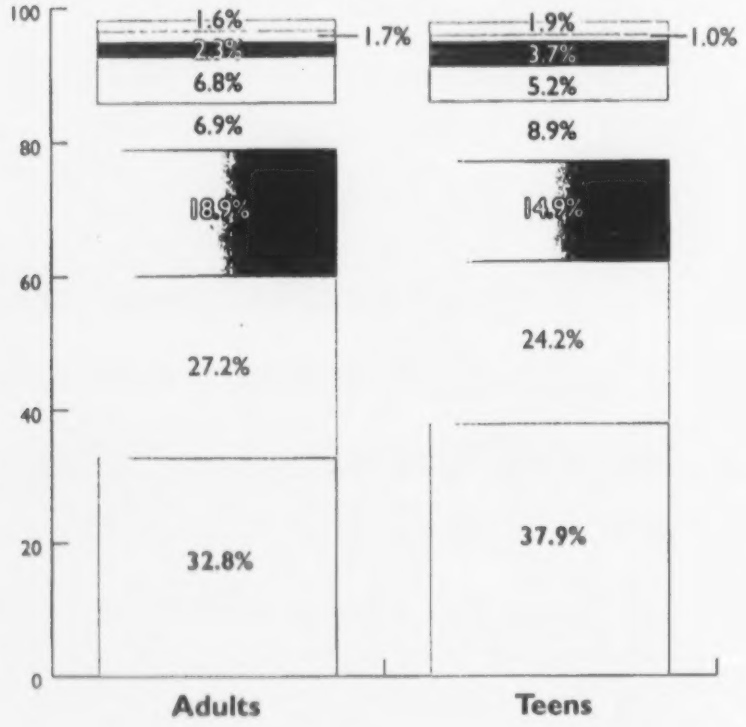
There are many reasons why teens get pregnant or get someone pregnant. In your opinion, which of the following is the primary reason why teens get pregnant or get someone pregnant? Would you say...



	Adults	Teens overall	Teens 12-14	Teens 15-19
Poor moral and values	**23.7%**	14.8%	10.3%	17.5%
Parents not paying attention	22.0%	22.4%	**33.2%**	16.0%
Lack of sufficient motivation to avoid pregnancy	19.4%	**23.2%**	16.9%	**26.9%**
The influence of alcohol and drugs	15.0%	22.3%	21.7%	22.7%
Birth control or protection being too hard to get	5.1%	7.9%	7.1%	8.5%
The media	9.0%	7.9%	8.9%	7.3%

SEX AND PREGNANCY: CHART SEVEN

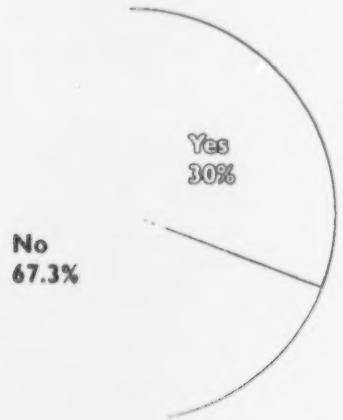
The teen pregnancy rate has been going down for the better part of the past decade. In your opinion, what is the primary reason explaining this decline? Would you say this is because of....



	Adults	Teens
Worry about AIDS/STDs	**32.8%**	**37.9%**
More birth control or protection is available	27.2%	24.2%
Increased attention to the issue	18.9%	14.9%
More parental involvement	6.9%	8.9%
Changing morals and values	6.8%	5.2%
Fewer teens having sex	2.3%	3.7%
Welfare reform	1.7%	1.0%
Improved economy	1.6%	1.9%

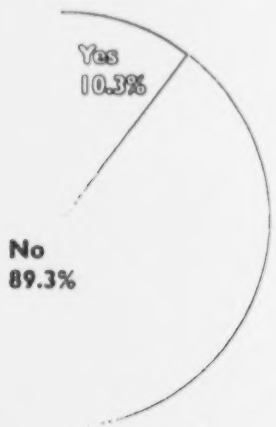
SEX AND PREGNANCY:
CHART EIGHT

For adults: In your community, are you aware of any organized effort to prevent teen pregnancy?



Adults

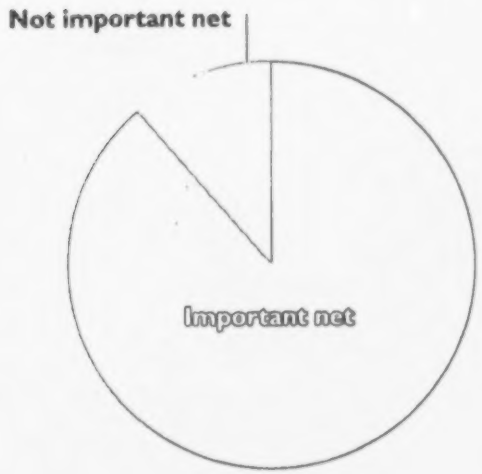
For teens: Putting school classes aside, have you ever been enrolled in a teen pregnancy prevention program?



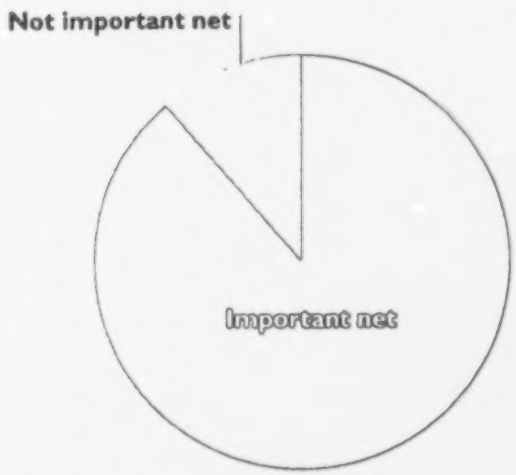
Teens

SEX AND PREGNANCY: CHART NINE

Thinking about the teens you know, do they think avoiding pregnancy is extremely important, somewhat important, not very important, or extremely unimportant?



Adults

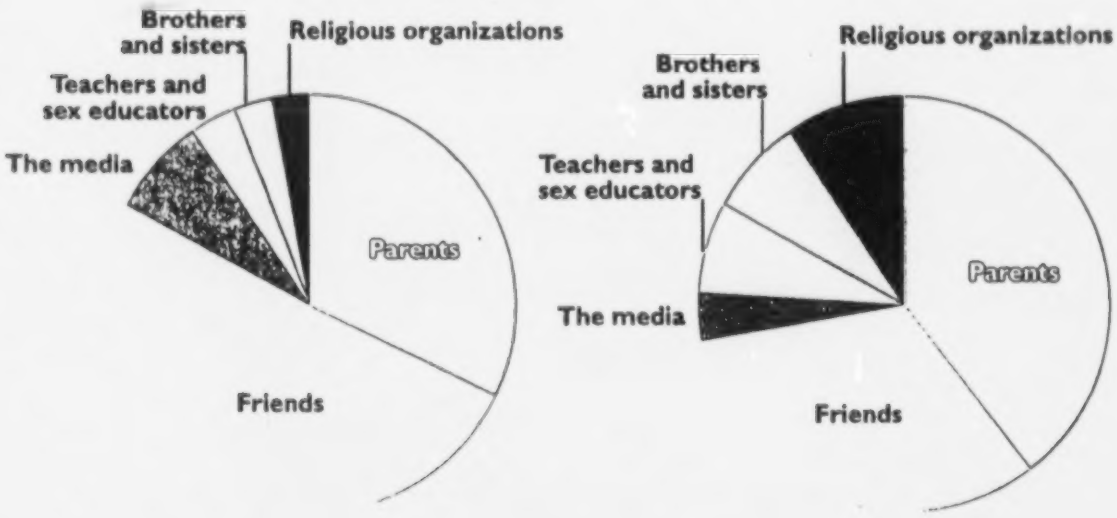


Teens

	Adults	Teens
Important net	**84.1%**	**86.7%**
Extremely important	59.6%	66.4%
Somewhat important	24.5%	20.3%
Not important net	**10.8%**	**11.1%**
Not very important	7.4%	7.4%
Extremely unimportant	3.4%	3.7%

SEX AND PREGNANCY:
CHART TEN

When it comes to teens' / your sexual decision-making, which of the following is most influential? Would you say...



	Adults	Teens
Parents	31.7%	**38.3%**
Friends	**50.0%**	31.7%
The media	7.5%	3.6%
Teachers and sex educators	3.5%	6.8%
Brothers and sisters	3.0%	7.4%
Religious organizations	2.9%	9.1%

How Does This Compare with Past Campaign Surveys?

These results are consistent with earlier National Campaign surveys. In previous polling conducted by the National Campaign, when asked who or what influenced their decisions about sex the most, more teens (aged 12-17) cited their parents than any other influence (37 percent). In comparison, 30 percent of teens cited their friends.

Source: *Not Just Another Thing to Do*, National Campaign, 2000

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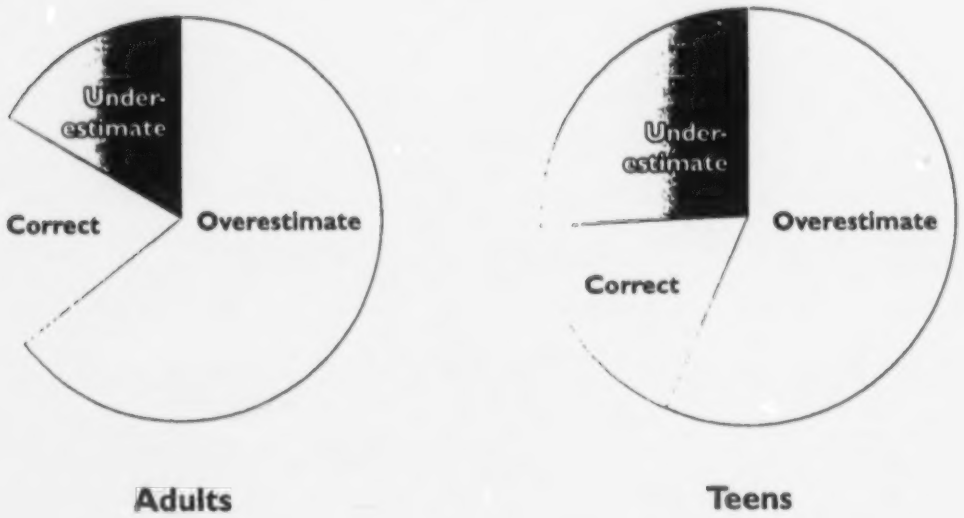
SEX AND PREGNANCY: CHART ELEVEN

As far as you know, what percentage of high school students (grades 9-12) has had sex?



Adults **Teens**

	Adults	Teens
Overestimate the percentage of high school students who have had sex.	**58.4%**	**54.4%**
Got the percentage correct	17.3%	17.0%
Underestimated the percentage of high school students who have had sex.	15.0%	24.8%

Note: Some 50 percent of high school students (grades 9-12) have had sex (Source: 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey).

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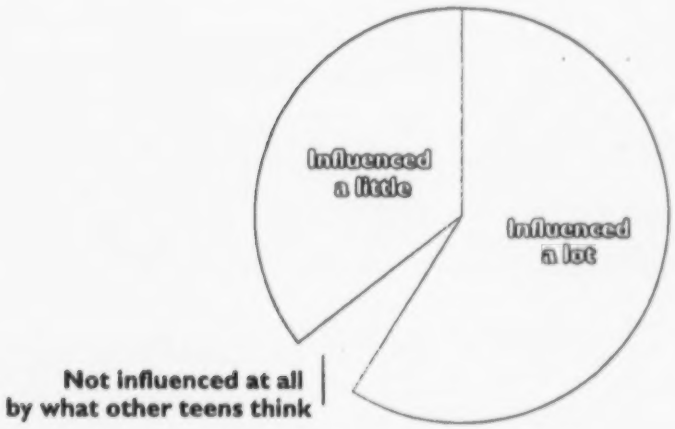
INFLUENCE:
CHART TWELVE

When your friends are deciding whether to have sex or not, how much do you think they are influenced by what other teens think? Would you say they are influenced a lot, influenced a little, or not influenced at all?

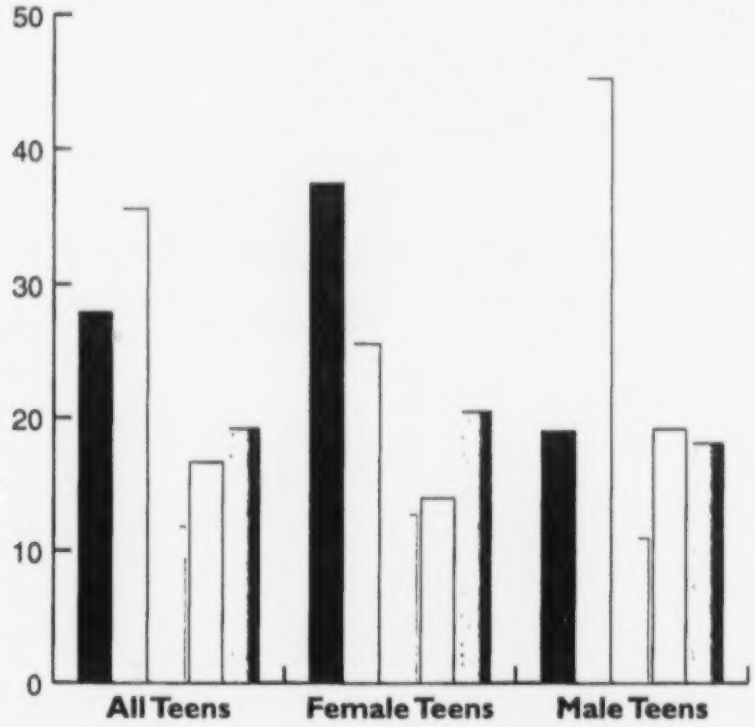


Teens

	Teens
Influenced net	**93.5%**
Influenced a lot by what other teens think	58.3%
Influenced a little by what other teens think	35.2%
Not influenced at all by what other teens think	5.5%

INFLUENCE:
CHART THIRTEEN

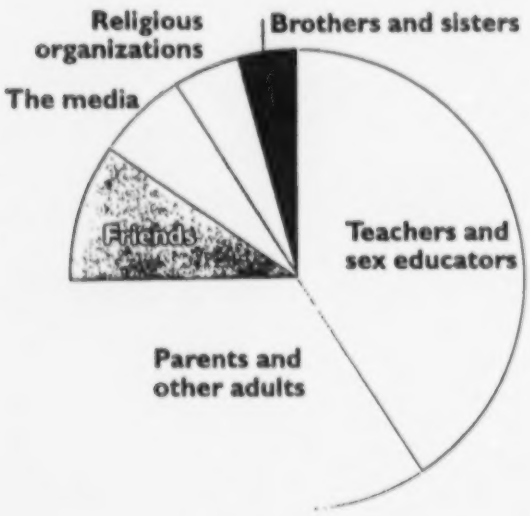
Even teens who haven't had sex say they feel pressure to have it. From which of the following sources have you ever felt pressure to have sex?



	All	Females	Males
Your partner	27.9%	**37.4%**	18.9%
Your friends	**35.6%**	25.6%	**45.2%**
The media	11.8%	12.7%	10.9%
Some other source	16.6%	13.9%	19.1%
Have not felt pressure to have sex	19.2%	20.5%	18.1%

INFLUENCE:
CHART FOURTEEN

Where have you learned the most about preventing teen pregnancy? Would you say...



Teens

	Teens
Teachers and sex educators	40.6%
Parents and other adults	33.9%
Friends	9.8%
The media	6.4%
Religious organizations	4.7%
Brothers and sisters	4.2%

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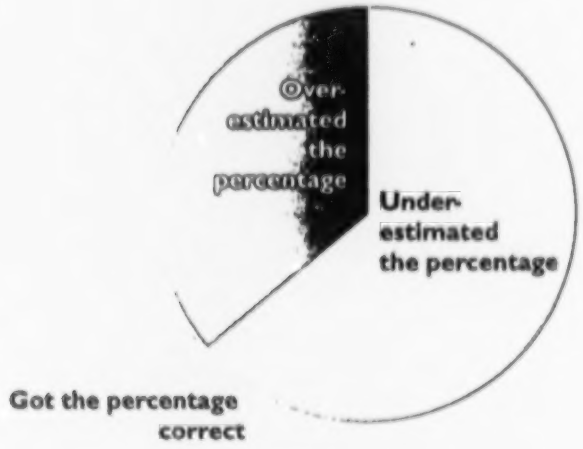
INFLUENCE:
CHART FIFTEEN

As far as you know, about what percentage of teenage girls get pregnant before they turn 20 years old?



Adults

	Adults
Underestimated the percentage	**45.4%**
Got the percentage correct	10.9%
Overestimated the percentage	31.7%

Note: Four out of ten girls become pregnant at least once before age 20 (Source: Flanigan, 2001).

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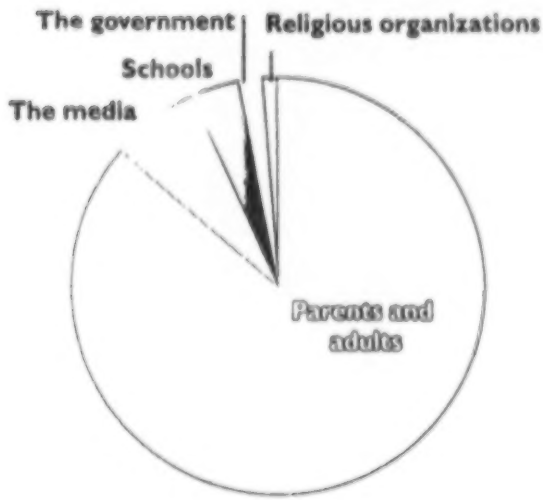
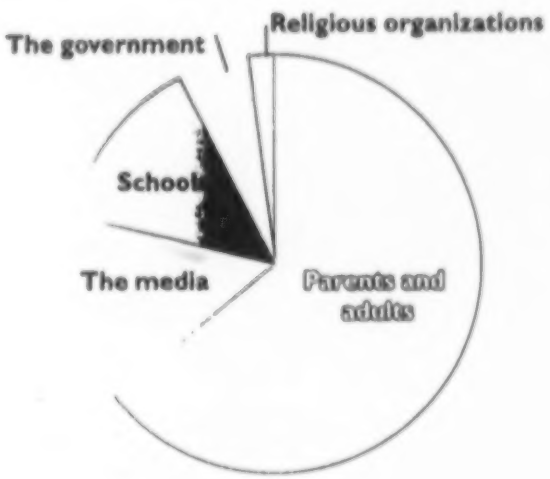
PARENTS:
CHART SIXTEEN

Other than teens themselves, who do you think is most responsible for fixing the problem of teen pregnancy? Would you say....



Adults



Teens

	Adults	Teens
Parents and adults	**85.0%**	**63.3%**
The media	6.8%	14.5%
Schools	3.7%	13.5%
The government	1.8%	5.4%
Religious organizations	1.2%	2.1%

24

PARENTS:
CHART SEVENTEEN

If parents have a close personal relationship with their children — including setting goals and having high expectations — do you think their children will be less likely to become pregnant or make somebody pregnant by mistake, more likely, or will it make no difference?

Adults

	Adults
Less likely to be become pregnant or make somebody pregnant by mistake	71.3%
More likely	8.0%
Make no difference	19.7%

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PARENTS:
CHART EIGHTEEN

Parents shouldn't be too concerned with talking to their kids about sex, love, and values because sex education is primarily the responsibility of schools. Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree strongly, or disagree somewhat?

Adults

	Adults
Disagree net	**91.0%**
Disagree strongly	78.0%
Disagree somewhat	13.0%
Agree net	**8.8%**
Agree strongly	6.5%
Agree somewhat	2.3%

PARENTS:
CHART NINETEEN

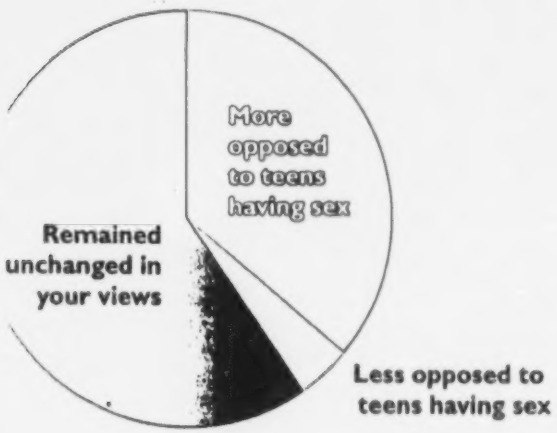
Parents believe they should talk to their kids about sex but often don't know what to say, how to say it, or when to start. Do you agree or disagree?

Adults

	Adults
Agree net	**88.4%**
Agree strongly	54.2%
Agree somewhat	34.2%
Disagree net	**10.8%**
Disagree somewhat	6.3%
Disagree strongly	4.5%

PARENTS:
CHART TWENTY

When it comes to teens having sex, over the past several years would you say that you have become more opposed, less opposed, or remained unchanged in your views?



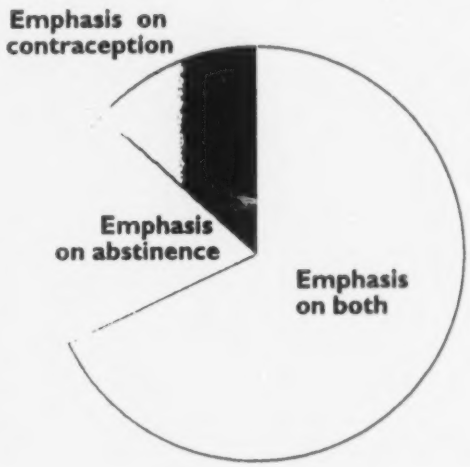
Adults

	Adults
More opposed to teens having sex	35.8%
Less opposed to teens having sex	4.3%
Remained unchanged in your views	59.2%

POLICYMAKERS:
CHART TWENTY-ONE

If you were to offer advice to leaders in Washington regarding teen pregnancy, would it be greater emphasis on encouraging teens not to have sex, greater emphasis on birth control or protection, or more emphasis on both?

Adults

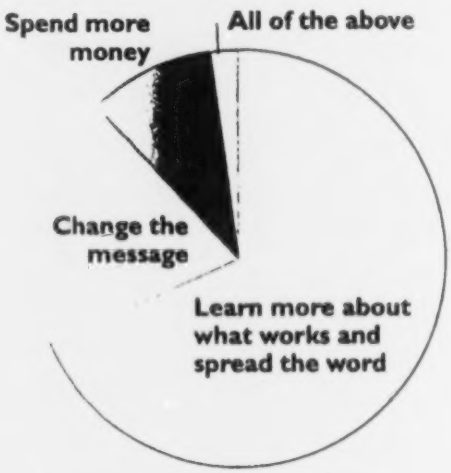


Teens

	Adults	Teens
Greater emphasis on encouraging teens not to have sex	23.2%	18.4%
Greater emphasis on birth control or protection	7.5%	13.3%
More emphasis on both	**68.6%**	**67.4%**

POLICYMAKERS:
CHART TWENTY-TWO

Among the following options, what do you think would be the most helpful thing public officials can do to reduce teen pregnancy?



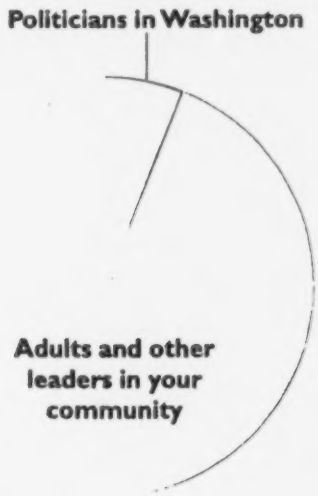
Adults

	Adults
Learn more about what works in preventing teen pregnancy and spread the word	**66.0%**
Change the message they give about the issue	19.0%
Spend more money on the issue	9.5%
All of the above	2.1%

30

POLICYMAKERS:
CHART TWENTY-THREE

Do you think solutions to reducing teen pregnancy will come mostly from politicians in Washington or from adults and other leaders in your community?



Adults

	Adults
Politicians in Washington	5.9%
Adults and other leaders in your community	**92.2%**

POLICYMAKERS:
CHART TWENTY-FOUR

Do you feel that there has been more focus on preventing teen pregnancy in the past five years?

Adults

Teens

	Adults	Teens
Yes	**82.2%**	**85.2%**
No	13.3%	13.2%

SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS FROM PREVIOUS NATIONAL CAMPAIGN POLLING

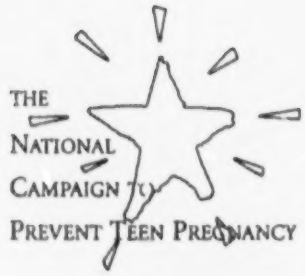
- Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of teens aged 12-17 who have had sexual intercourse wish they had waited longer. Of those surveyed, more than one-half of teen boys (55 percent) and the overwhelming majority of teen girls (72 percent) said they wish they had waited longer (*Not Just Another Thing to Do* poll, 2000).

- The vast majority of teens surveyed (87 percent) do not think it is embarrassing for teens to admit they are virgins (*The Cautious Generation* poll, 2000).

- More than half of teens (53 percent) surveyed said the main reason teens do not use birth control is because of drinking or using drugs (*Risky Business* poll, 2000).

- Slightly more than half of teens (52 percent) we surveyed believe that one of the main reasons that teens do not use birth control is because their partners don't want to. Surprisingly, teen boys (49 percent) and girls (54 percent) agree that pressure from their partners is one of the main reasons that teens fail to use birth control (*Risky Business* poll, 2000).

Note: The results of polling from previous years reflect nationally-representative estimates of teens aged 12-17 and adults aged 18 and over. This year's survey provides nationally-representative estimates of young people aged 12-19 and adults aged 20 and over. The complete results of all Campaign polling can be found at: www.teenpregnancy.org/polldata.htm



The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan initiative supported almost entirely by private donations. The Campaign's mission is to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families by reducing teen pregnancy. Our goal is to reduce the rate of teen pregnancy by one-third between 1996 and 2005.

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